

EXHIBIT F

Dear Mayor Leffingwell, Mayor Pro Tem Cole and Members of the Austin City Council:

As members of the Charter Revision Committee, we strongly concur with our fellow committee members on the need for geographic representation for the Austin City Council. We believe it is important to retain two seats from larger geographic areas, preferably at large, in any new electoral system. We support this approach for the reasons presented in this letter.

We also believe that we must all work together if change to a geographic system is to occur. As represented and eloquently explained by one of the Committee members, a significant number of Austin voters want no change at all. Without consensus to move forward with one proposal on the ballot, there will be little opportunity to achieve a change. To that end, we attempted to move forward with a consensus for a 10-2-1 plan because we thought this approach would address our concerns about retaining some larger geographic representation and our colleagues' preference for at least 10 smaller districts. We regret that we were not able to reach consensus on this proposal.

Reasons Supporting Hybrid:

1. Austin voters may be more likely to approve a hybrid system, which retains some familiar elements, rather than a more radical switch to a pure single-member system. As previously noted, we strongly support some form of geographical representation for Austin and favor a system more likely to be adopted by the general electorate.

2. Minority groups that are not geographically concentrated strongly believe they will have a better opportunity to elect a representative in an at-large seat. Leaders of Austin's Asian-American community organizations spoke uniformly and compellingly to this point in public hearings of the Committee, as did some members of the African American community. We believe the issues they raised may also apply to the gay community or any other minority group not concentrated in a defined geographic area of Austin. Finally, we believe we must listen to the voices of these communities, just as we have listened to others who have come forward, and craft a plan that honors both. There is no need to adopt a plan that splits our communities.

3. Minority groups that are geographically concentrated in a single-member district will have the opportunity secure additional representation by running candidates for either or both at-large seats. A case in point is the nine-member AISD Board of Trustees, which operates on a hybrid system and currently includes two African-American representatives, one in a single-member district seat, and one in at-large seat (notably, the latter won in a citywide race against a white candidate from Northwest Austin). Austin's African-American population has decreased from 10% in 2000 to 8.1% in 2010; if that trend continues or if the current African-American population becomes more dispersed, at-large seats may offer additional opportunities for continued robust representation.

4. Retaining two at-large seats will allow voters to cast a ballot for up to four Council seats, including the mayor, and to vote in every city election. Under a pure single-member district system, voters would be limited to two votes – one for their own representative and one for the mayor. Assuming half of all Council Member races appeared on the same ballot as the mayoral race, at least half the electorate could only vote for a candidate in every other city election, a scenario unlikely to encourage increased citizen engagement or higher voter turnout.

5. Retaining two at-large seats will allow more than one highly qualified candidate from the same area to mount a successful run for City Council, without creating a serious power imbalance. Under a pure single-member district system, two candidates from the same area could not simultaneously serve on City Council unless one is the mayor. Even in the highly unlikely event that two at-large positions *and* the mayor were elected from the same geographic area *and* subsequently voted in lockstep on all issues with the district representative, the resulting 9-4 block, with these four in the minority, would hardly create a serious threat to majority rule (this assumption is based on an 10-2-1 hybrid, but the same would likely hold true for a 7-4 block under an 8-2-1 system). We also believe it is doubtful that citywide voters would choose all three at-large positions from a single district if a power imbalance is a true concern.

6. In a pure single-member district system, a constituent will have little recourse for timely representation if his or her own Council Member is unresponsive or ineffective. Council Members are human and may become unresponsive or ineffective for a variety of reasons: they may not share a constituent’s concern for a given issue; they may have a legal conflict of interest that prevents them from discussing or voting on a case; they may become temporarily incapacitated through illness or accident; they may have a personal problem with an individual constituent; or they may simply be unable to form effective alliances or achieve consensus with colleagues. While we hope that all Council offices would remain open to all members of the public, in fact, single-member district representatives have little incentive to divert time and attention – always in short supply – from the needs of their own constituents. A constituent may attempt to schedule a meeting with the mayor, but due to the high demands on that office (which will likely increase in a pure single-member district system), this may be difficult to do in a time-sensitive case. Of course, an aggrieved constituent may attempt to dislodge an ineffective Council Member in the next election, but three years is a long time to go without viable representation. We believe retaining two at-large seats provides an improved opportunity for any Austin resident to be heard by city hall.

7. An at-large seat may provide valuable information to citizens about a Council Member contemplating a mayoral run. Some citizens who addressed the Committee spoke disparagingly of at-large seats as “mayor-in-waiting” positions. We do not believe that an at-large seat would be an automatic springboard to the mayor’s office, and experience in cities such as Houston has shown that this is not usually the case. However, where Council Members may be contemplating a mayoral run, we believe there is value in letting Austin voters see how that person responds to the needs of the entire city, and an at-large seat provides that opportunity.

8. A hybrid system strikes a balance between the interests of geographic districts and the city as a whole. An all-districts city council, while empowering neighborhoods, also encourages provincialism. There are many issues addressed at city hall that go beyond neighborhood boundaries. Absent a strong-mayor form of government or the power of a mayoral veto, a city council elected only from districts would have less incentive to exercise fiscal and policy discipline.

We hope that Council is able to put on the ballot a consensus proposal for geographic representation that reflects the concerns of all residents of the city. We pledge to support the Council in this effort and to work for the ballot proposal in November. Regardless of the electoral system voters ultimately choose, we look toward a future that honors the bonds of friendship, respect and understanding among all who call Austin home.

Submitted by the Undersigned Members of the Charter Revision Committee:

Ann Kitchen, Co-Chair
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